

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL COMMITTEE MINUTES

Committee: Local Development Framework Cabinet Committee **Date:** 11 March 2010

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.05 pm

Members Present: R Bassett (Chairman), M Cohen, B Rolfe, Mrs M Sartin and Ms S Stavrou

Other Councillors: Mrs D Collins, R Frankel, Mrs A Grigg, J Philip, Mrs C Pond, D Stallan, C Whitbread and J M Whitehouse

Apologies: -

Officers Present: K Polyzoides (Assistant Director (Policy & Conservation)), I White (Forward Planning Manager), A Wintle (Principal Planning Officer), D Clifton (Principal Housing Officer [IT]) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

21. ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

In the absence of the Chairman, the Democratic Services Officer opened the meeting and requested nominations for the role of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Councillor R Bassett be elected Chairman for the duration of the meeting.

22. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman made a short address to remind all present that the meeting would be broadcast on the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

23. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

24. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9 November 2009 be taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

25. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Cabinet Committee noted its Terms of Reference, as agreed by the Council on 17 February 2009 (minute 113(a) refers).

26. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Forward Planning Manager gave the Cabinet Committee a briefing upon the progress made with the evidence base for the Core Strategy.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that the reports upon the Landscape Character Assessment, the Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study, the Strategic Housing Market Assessment and the Harlow Options Appraisal, which would eventually form part of the evidence base, were background technical documents not policy documents. Therefore there was no need for the Cabinet Committee to formally adopt them but just note them as part of the developing evidence base. The purpose of these documents would be to assist in the preparation of the Issues and Options for the first round of consultation in respect of the Core Strategy during the summer of 2010. Following their consideration by the Cabinet Committee, they would be published on the Council's website as technical documents. Reports on further studies, which would also form part of the evidence base, would be considered at future meetings.

The Cabinet Committee had concerns about noting the contents of documents that they had not seen, and that the reports presented to the Cabinet Committee contained too many technical terms. The Cabinet Committee felt strongly that as the Local Development Framework was an important piece of work, all the information and reports should be made available to Members to enable informed decisions to be made.

27. EPPING FOREST LANDSCAPE STUDIES

This matter was deferred until a future meeting when it would be considered in conjunction with the Landscape Character Assessment and Settlement Edge Landscape Sensitivity Study produced by Chris Blandford Associates. The Chairman also requested that copies of both reports be placed in the Members' Room before it was next considered.

The Committee was of the opinion that it was not acceptable to publish technical documents without Members first having the opportunity to read them. The provision of a glossary for the two reports was also requested.

28. STRATEGIC HOUSING MARKET ASSESSMENT - FINAL REPORT

The Cabinet Committee again agreed to defer consideration of this report until a future meeting after copies of the final report of the Strategic Housing Market Assessment had been provided for members of the Cabinet Committee.

The Principal Planning Officer explained the differences between the different types of housing, that an assessment of the viability of affordable housing was being

undertaken, and clarified the figures quoted in the report regarding house sizes and their relative need within the District.

It was noted that house prices within the District were generally much higher than other comparable areas of the country, and that there was a need for affordable housing within the District, primarily for young people.

29. LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Principal Planning Officer provided an update on the progress made with the different background studies for the Local Development Framework, which would contribute to the evidence base and guide future decision making on planning matters within the District.

It was reported that the Employment Land Study was being jointly managed with Brentwood Borough Council and would indicate the capacity and need for employment land within the District during the period to 2031. A meeting had been arranged with the local Chamber of Commerce to discuss the initial draft report, and the final report was expected at the end of April 2010. The Strategic Flood Risk Assessment was being prepared in collaboration with Harlow District Council and would examine the nature and extent of the flood risk across the District. The final report was expected in April 2010. A draft of the Town Centres Study had been presented to Officers and was currently being updated following the publication of Planning Policy Statement 4: Planning for Sustainable Economic Growth in December 2009, and would include traffic and parking issues. The final report was due by the end of March 2010.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that the Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment was a key piece of the evidence base and was intended to be an objective assessment of potential housing sites within the District over the next fifteen years. It was emphasised that the assessment would only provide information on potential housing sites and would not make any decisions on which sites were most suitable. It was felt that external consultants should be engaged to complete this piece of work, particularly the site visits and viability testing. It was estimated that this would cost approximately £30,000, for which a supplementary estimate would be sought in due course. The draft methodology would be presented to the Cabinet Committee in the near future for agreement, along with the criteria for identifying sites.

A review of planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry was also planned. The last study of the glasshouse industry had been published in 2003, and this had influenced the policies in the adopted Local Plan Alterations. It had always been the intention to review these policies after a suitable period, and a recent planning application within the Lea Valley had highlighted the need for a review of those sites identified for potential de-designation. The large glasshouse development undertaken in Thanet would also be investigated as to its potential long-term impact on the viability of the Lea Valley industry where the individual holdings were much smaller. The work was highly specialised and would need to be carried out by external consultants; the estimated cost was in the region of £30,000 for which a supplementary estimate would again be required.

In response to questions from the Cabinet Committee, it was reiterated that the release of Green Belt land for housing was not inevitable; existing urban areas would be examined first. The most likely scenario would be for approximately 3,000 new houses to be built within the District between 2021 and 2031. Land held by public

bodies would also form part of the assessment. It was understood that large scale developments on Green Belt land would not be popular, both with Councillors and residents. Highway infrastructure information could be provided by Essex County Council, and it was intended to engage with key stakeholders to ascertain the infrastructure requirements for future possible housing developments.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the progress on the background studies required for the Local Development Framework be noted; and

(2) That, although funding would initially be contained within the existing budgets for the Local Development Framework, a future maximum supplementary estimate in the sum of £60,000 (£30,000 each) could be required for the:

(a) Strategic Housing Land Availability Assessment; and

(b) review of planning policy on the Lea Valley glasshouse industry.

30. "GENERATING AND APPRAISING SPATIAL OPTIONS FOR THE HARLOW AREA" - SCOTT WILSON REPORT

This report was deferred until a future meeting when it would be considered in conjunction with the full report compiled by Scott Wilson. A glossary was also requested to explain some of the technical terms within the report.

31. PLANNING ADVISORY SERVICE DIAGNOSTIC ON THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

The Forward Planning Manager presented a report regarding the results of the diagnostic tool offered by the Planning Advisory Service on the Council's preparation of the Local Development Framework.

The Cabinet Committee was informed that a consultant on behalf of the Planning Advisory Service had visited the Council and had conducted a number of interviews concerning the preparation of the Local Development Framework on 12 October 2009. The final report, containing recommendations for actions, had been received in December 2009. The recommendations in the report covered matters such as the further involvement of non-executive Members in the Local Development Framework process, the need to address the governance arrangements for the delivery of the proposed growth of Harlow, and further liaison with other key stakeholders.

The Cabinet Committee expressed their dissatisfaction that only one Councillor (The Leader of Council who was responsible for Forward Planning) had been included in the interview process conducted by the Consultant, and that consequently there was not enough evidence in the report to support some of its assertions. It was felt that a number of other Councillors, both executive and non-executive, should have been interviewed as well before commenting upon the behaviour of Councillors.

The Leader and the Deputy Leader of the Council informed the Cabinet Committee that the recommendations within the report encouraged the further involvement of Councillors with the process. The partnership working with Harlow and East Herts District Councils was still only at the Leader and Chief Executive level, but all Members of the Council would be encouraged to attend the proposed joint training

sessions. It was suggested that the last recommendation should read Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership, not the County, and that a number of seminars should be organised as part of the joint briefing/awareness programme.

RECOMMENDED:

(1) That the following recommendations, listed in order of priority, made by the Planning Advisory Service in relation to the preparation of the Local Development Framework be recommended to the Cabinet for adoption:

(a) That steps be taken to ensure that the Leader and the Chief Executive were engaged with the partnership work with East Herts and Harlow to champion the development of joint or co-ordinated work and documents in a timely way;

(b) That an engagement plan be produced which identified the key stakeholders, including internal services, across the area, and how best to engage with them throughout the preparation of the joint or co-ordinated Development Plan Document;

(c) That a joint briefing/awareness programme for key internal partners and Members be developed, including the organisation of joint seminars, to raise understanding of the benefits of the Local Development Framework;

(d) That non-executive Members be involved as part of the visioning and objective setting process to increase ownership of the Local Development Framework;

(e) That the issues connected with the sharing of information, monitoring of the core (strategy) Development Plan Document, consultation processes and evaluation, including the need for ICT systems, be addressed and planned for;

(f) That Councillors be encouraged to seek support through the Planning Advisory Service Planning Members' and Leaders' networks; and

(g) That further support be sought from the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership on best practice and sign-posting to information; and

(2) That the concerns expressed by the Cabinet Committee over the lack of Member involvement in the initial interview process be noted.

Reasons for Decision:

The Planning Advisory Service had undertaken the review in order to aid the Council's preparation of a sound Local Development Framework. The final report had been received and the recommendations had been proposed to the Cabinet for adoption. The Cabinet Committee had raised concerns over the lack of Member involvement in the initial interview process.

Other Options Considered and Rejected:

To not take action following the recommendations of the Planning Advisory Service.

32. GYPSY & TRAVELLER DEVELOPMENT PLAN DOCUMENT

It was reported that the Council was still awaiting a response from the Minister regarding its request to hold a meeting to discuss this issue.

33. SUSTAINABILITY APPRAISAL SCOPING REPORT

Copies of the draft Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report were distributed to members of the Cabinet Committee. The Council was under a statutory obligation to consult upon the document, and it would be considered at the next meeting of the Cabinet Committee.

CHAIRMAN